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Current Opinion

The Blessing of Theological Controversy

In the April number of the *Hibbert Journal* Rev. F. W. Ordeyard, in writing upon "The Lord as a Man of War," declares that "it is incompatibles rather than the compatibles that unite at last." This sounds a trifle delphic, but, after all, the meaning is plain. The fundamental attribute of God is not inaction. As the author goes on to say: "God fights for us and with us by the very constitution of his own law, and perhaps his own being, as our adversary, and yet (as such) our greatest friend." The truth in this statement suggests that we should not be afraid of theological controversy. Our ideas grow sharper and are corrected as we find them attacked by others. Perhaps the same thing is true of their views as well. At any rate, controversy is something inevitable. Out from the bitter let us get the sweet. If we must form our own criteria, and oppose as well as approve other men's views; and if, in turn, they must criticise and oppose as well as approve ours, let us remember that we are all alike working for the same cause. An honest man ought not to care whether his view or that of someone else is accepted. He should want truth accepted, and he should not believe that another man is trying to destroy truth just because the two differ. It is only a little, mean mind that sees an infidel in every theological opponent. None of us has a monopoly of omniscience. We each may be partly wrong, or we may each be wholly wrong. We ought to be thankful to any man who will show us if we are either. And above all let us not forget that theological controversy is not theological squabbling.

A New Interpreter of the Suffering Christ

We have not been accustomed to class Oscar Wilde among theologians. In fact, he would have been the last man to permit it. Yet in his latest book, *De Profundis*, written in the Reading Gaol, there are two or three pages of the most exquisite and sincere interpretation of the suffering of Jesus. Oscar Wilde was an artificial soul, but suffering seems at last to have taught him sincerity. And he was enough of a poet to sympathize with some of the agony which must have been endured by Jesus. In *De Profundis* he disclaims religion and morality in the ordinary sense of

the words, but believes that through suffering he has found his soul. And, having found it, he suddenly sees the meaning of Jesus.

His experience is typical. A man may talk glibly, and even with intellectual assent, of Jesus and his death, but the real meaning of that death comes to one only as he himself stands face to face with kindred suffering in himself or in others. Then, somehow, the real meaning of Jesus' experience comes into his soul and helps him to know himself and helps him to know the meaning of suffering. Thereafter he may balk at mechanical theories of the atonement, but he knows that the world with the story of a dead Christ is a different world from what it was without that story.

Literary Analysis as a Passing Phase of Biblical Study

Professor John D. Davis, in the *Princeton Theological Review* for April, in reviewing Professor Kent's *Student's Old Testament*, calls attention to the fact that "nothing is gained by analysis unless the documents discovered by it are inconsistent." He goes on to say: "The supreme question concerns the authenticity of these early narratives, and the debate is being made to rest more and more upon broader considerations than the analysis." There is considerable truth in these statements; but whoever for a moment thought that criticism stopped with analysis? Its main object is to discover the authenticity and the trustworthiness of any document. That, however, does not offset the necessity of making analyses. None the less, Professor Davis is right in insisting that we have passed the period of merely literary analysis and have entered that of broad historical treatment. The great question here, however, is not the question of authenticity, important as that is. It is rather that of the permanent value of teaching found in authentic documents. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Moses wrote every word in the Pentateuch. What effect would that have upon our treatment of the Pentateuch? Would the Christian be any more under obligation to obey its laws? Historical processes, when applied to the Bible, are just as unlikely as literary analysis to satisfy those persons who would hold to the Bible's verbal inerrancy and its uniform permanent authority.

Biblical Criticism in the Church of England.

A most interesting and instructive indication of the present state of opinion in the Church of England is furnished by a manifesto lately circulated for signature among the clergymen of that church, and signed

by about one hundred of them. It is so felicitous an expression of the fearlessness of faith and the courage of scholarship that we reproduce it entire for the benefit of our readers:

We, the undersigned clergymen of the Church of England—observing, on the one hand, the present unsettled condition of religious opinion, which, while due in the main to the general trend of modern thought, specially connects itself for the clergy with the critical study of the New Testament; and, on the other hand, a counter-tendency to treat the full discussion of many questions arising from such study as inadmissible for our church, and so to commit us as a body to non-critical views of the New Testament scriptures—desire to record—

Our sense of the grave and manifold religious issues involved in the present critical discussions and of the urgent need for English churchmen to combine an earnest faith in the Holy Spirit who guides into all truth with as earnest an effort to contribute to a solution of these problems;

Our desire that, as many of the clergy have already, with advantage to Christian faith and with a general assent on the part of their rulers, welcomed important results of a patient, reverent, and progressive criticism of the Old Testament, so the clergy, as Christian teachers, may now receive authoritative encouragement to face the critical problems of the New Testament with entire candor, reverence for God and his truth, and loyalty to the church of Christ;

Our fear lest the door of ordination should be closed to men who patiently and reverently apply historical methods to the gospel records, and so an increasing number of men both spiritually and intellectually qualified should be lost to the high office of the ministry;

Our conviction that it is not without grave responsibility and peril that any of us should build the faith of souls primarily upon details of New Testament narrative, the historical validity of which must ultimately be determined in the court of trained research—although many of us, until such final decision take shape, may cling devotedly to the traditional details in question;

Our confidence that the faith of the church in the years to come, whatever historical revisions may await us, will stand, without risk and without discontinuity, upon the spiritual foundations to which Christian experience and the creed of the church alike bear testimony.

This manifesto is attracting no little attention in England and, naturally enough, receiving some adverse criticism. In one aspect of the matter it is the old question whether dissenters from the opinions enshrined in the creed of the church are in duty bound to withdraw from the ecclesiastical bodies of which they are members, or may remain and seek to modify the opinion, and eventually perhaps the creed, of the church.